



Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area  
Georgia

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

Finding of No Significant Impact  
February 2012

The Selected Alternative does not constitute an action that requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Selected Alternative will not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment. There are no unmitigated adverse effects to physical resources, water resources, natural resources, cultural resources, or other unique resources within the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, or known cumulative effects were identified.

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed federal actions are consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in section 101 (a) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and that they will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102 (2) (c) of NEPA.

Recommended:

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Date:

2/24/12

Chris Abbett

Assistant Regional Director, Partnerships  
Southeast Region, National Park Service

Approved:

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Date:

2/27/12

David Vela

Regional Director  
Southeast Region, National Park Service

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (Heritage Area) was designated by the U.S. Congress on October 12, 2006, with the enactment of The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-338, Title II, Subtitle C). The legislation designates the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance (Alliance) as the local coordinating entity and requires the completion of a management plan to guide the Heritage Area. The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area Management Plan is intended to guide a coordinated effort, led by the Alliance, to protect, develop, interpret, and promote the Heritage Area's resources in ways that reflect the area's national distinctiveness, for the benefit of current and future generations.

Section 236 of the P.L. 109-338 requires that the local coordinating entity develop a management plan that takes into account local plans and invites public participation. The plan should include an inventory of resources in the Heritage Area; a list of property that relates to the purposes of the Heritage Area; an assessment of cultural landscapes; and provisions for the protection, interpretation and enjoyment of the Heritage Area consistent with the legislation. The plan should also include an interpretation plan and a program for implementation of the management plan. This management plan, developed through collaboration between the Alliance and the National Park Service, fulfills the requirement of Public Law 109-338.

The purpose of this management plan for the Heritage Area is to provide a framework to guide the Alliance over the next 15–20 years. This plan identifies programs and strategies to protect, interpret, and promote the Heritage Area's cultural, historic, recreational, educational, scenic, and natural resources; identifies existing and potential public and private partnerships; includes a comprehensive interpretation plan; recommends criteria and sources for financial assistance; and fosters cooperative relationships among federal, state, regional, and local agencies. Informed by an extensive public participation process, the plan integrates the ongoing efforts of multiple partners over a broad region, helping to prevent duplication of activity and resolve conflicts of interest. This finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is for the environmental assessment for the management plan and will stand alone as it is currently written.

## **SELECTED ACTION**

The preferred alternative, called "The Hybrid," as presented in the management plan and environmental assessment is the selected alternative. The selected alternative presents a comprehensive strategy for future management and protection of the Heritage Area's diverse historic sites, unusual natural habitats, and cultural traditions. The plan is based on the mission, objectives, goals, and supporting focus areas and strategies established by the Alliance, with extensive input from the public and partners.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Alliance is to "ensure that the recreational, natural and historical resources of Arabia Mountain and its environs are protected, connected by greenway corridors and well managed to provide citizens and future generations the opportunity to enjoy this magnificent feature of Georgia's heritage."

### **Goals**

A coordinated effort among many public agencies and entities will be needed to implement the selected alternative. Fortunately, public agencies and local governments of the Heritage Area have a history of partnership and cooperation that will provide a solid foundation for implementing this plan.

The overarching mission for the Heritage Area is supported by six goals:

**Goal 1:** To protect historic resources in the Heritage Area.

- Goal 2:** To create new learning opportunities / facilities.
- Goal 3:** To encourage “Smart Growth” & Sustainability.
- Goal 4:** To protect & restore the Heritage Area’s natural resources.
- Goal 5:** To expand open space and recreation opportunities
- Goal 6:** To tell the diverse story of the region

## **Focus Areas**

Five overarching themes, or focus areas, have been identified in the plan. Each focus area is connected to a variety of resources that represent it in various depths, and each is anchored by a “gateway” facility for interpretive opportunities.

- Focus Area 1:** Culture and Community (Gateway: Vaughters’ Farm)
- Focus Area 2:** Natural Systems (Gateway: Panola Mountain State Park)
- Focus Area 3:** Early Settlement (Gateway: South River and Flat Rock Community)
- Focus Area 4:** Granite Industry and Technology (Gateway: City of Lithonia)
- Focus Area 5:** Spiritual Landscape (Gateway: Monastery of the Holy Spirit)

## **MITIGATING MEASURES**

**As part of implementation of the management plan, the Alliance will select projects and actions based on best management practices including:**

- Decisions about projects potentially impacting natural resources will be based on scholarly research and scientific information; in consultation with other agencies as appropriate. Specifically, projects will be sited to avoid sensitive habitats and minimize disturbance to threatened and endangered species.
- Work with partners to identify key habitat areas for sensitive species and determining the level, if any, of access that should be provided to visitors in these areas. Access could range from permanent and/or seasonal closures, depending on the species, habitat type, and forage and breeding patterns, to providing limited access and low-impact recreational opportunities.
- Work with partners to encourage natural resource management that balances preservation and conservation needs with sustainable economic uses.
- Through partnerships, biologically diverse native communities will be protected and restored when and where appropriate.
- Management decisions about cultural resources will be based on scholarly research and scientific information and will be made in consultation with the Georgia state historic preservation officer and associated ethnic groups, as appropriate. The historic integrity of properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places would be protected.
- Use partnerships to encourage university research, state and local agencies and organizations to support local efforts in completing archeological surveys, especially in areas threatened by development, coastal erosion, or other human-made or natural threats.
- Whenever possible, adaptive use of historic structures will be encouraged. The Alliance will work with local historic districts, the main streets program, historical societies, and the state historic preservation office to increase awareness of historic structures, and their value to the community, and to tell the stories of the Heritage Area. The Alliance will encourage partners to consult the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, when implementing projects affecting historic buildings or in historic districts.

- Encourage partners to protect cultural landscapes and contributing features when implementing projects getting heritage area support. Further, the Alliance will encourage university researchers and others to carry out additional inventories to identify cultural landscapes and resources potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

**Alternative 1, No action:** consists of the continuation of existing management and trends, and serves as the basis for evaluating the other alternatives.

**Alternative 2, Network:** Utilize trails and key byways as the primary corridors of interpretation, encouraging visitors to experience the sites and history of the Heritage Area. The Network alternative focuses on routes as the primary access to key features, venues and facilities within the Heritage Area. The Network concept emphasizes the experience of moving through the Heritage Area as the primary means to understand and learn about it.

**Alternative 3, Area:** Preserves distinctive natural and man-made landscapes within the Heritage Area as large-scale areas of environmental quality that communicate the history and culture to residents and visitors. The Area concept seeks to enhance and preserve the quality of the Heritage Area's landscapes by differentiating areas of varying character and encouraging local entities to preserve these settings.

**Alternative 4, Cluster:** Focus interpretation of the Heritage Area's history and culture at key locations that become the 'gateways' to understand the Heritage Area's 'themes,' or stories. The Cluster concept utilizes a series of areas (or clusters) to communicate the rich story of the Heritage Area. This concept provides four clusters that allow the visitor to 'customize' the experience and story based on interest, time or accessibility.

**Alternative 5, Hybrid (Selected Alternative):** This alternative combines the primary routes discussed in the Network Concept (Alternative 2), the enhancement of key landscapes/ environments in the Area Concept (Alternative 3) and the gateways located in the Cluster Concept (Alternative 4). The Hybrid alternative simplifies the above concepts by engaging the visitor at a primary gateway, located at a preserved agricultural landscape, and then directing the visitor to other secondary gateways (currently under non-profit or public ownership) located at themed focus areas that effectively interpret the culture, people, landscapes and environmental features of the Heritage Area.

## ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

According to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (43 CFR 46.30), the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative "that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the Responsible Official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative."

Alternative 5, Hybrid is the environmentally preferable alternative because it most effectively meets the CEQ definition of the environmentally preferable alternative and addresses the issues associated with the natural, cultural, and socio-economic resources, resulting in Long-term Beneficial Impacts ranging from minor to moderate for all impact categories.

## WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

*Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse aspects and which on balance may be beneficial, but that may still have significant adverse impacts which require analysis in an EIS*

No significant adverse impacts were identified that would require an analysis in an EIS. The key impacts of implementing the preferred alternative are anticipated to include:

- *Topographic and Geological Features:* Moderate, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to increasing public awareness, directing visitor traffic, and relieving pressures of increased visitation on granite formations.
- *Hydrologic Systems/Riparian Corridors and Water Quality:* Moderate, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to restoring, preserving, and buffering of riparian corridors and increased visitor knowledge and awareness of hydrologic systems.
- *Vegetation and Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plant Species:* Moderate, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to controlling foot traffic, educating visitors, relieving visitation pressures on sensitive ecosystems, and enhancing key ecosystems.
- *Fauna and Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Animal Species:* Moderate, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to controlling visitor impact, relieving visitation pressures on sensitive habitats, educating visitors, and enhancing and protecting wildlife resources.
- *Air Quality:* Minor, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to providing and encouraging use of alternative transportation that links key resources.
- *Archaeological Resources:* Major, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to a layering approach for education, preservation, and appreciation of key resources and their known and potential locations.
- *Cultural and Historical Resources:* Major, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to combined effort of landscape preservation, historic structure and site conservation, and interpretation for visitors.
- *Recreation/Open Space Resources:* Major, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to expansion of existing multi-use trail, greenspace connectivity, and promotion of river and wildlife recreational opportunities.
- *Regional Growth and Land Use Pressures:* Moderate, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to expansion of visitor facilities, reuse of existing structures, and providing alternative transportation, and expanding greenway corridors.
- *Tourism:* Major, Long-term Beneficial Impact due to expansion of visitor facilities, providing central visitor center, and providing connectivity and tours through driving and walking routes.

### *Degree of effect on public health or safety*

Public health and safety did not arise as a problem or issue that required a change in current management. There are no actions in the preferred alternative that will affect public health or safety.

*Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas*

Implementing the preferred alternative will have beneficial effects on historic and cultural resources and wetlands. Because of the numerous granite outcrops in the area, the Heritage Area contains appropriate habitat for two imperiled granite outcrop plants. The US Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes the importance coordinating with the Alliance in support of conservation and recovery

opportunities and has initiated discussions with the Heritage Area staff and Alliance partners to improve outcrop habitat and reduce visitor impacts.

*Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial*

Management and planning for the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area has been going on since 2004. The Alliance and partner agencies and organizations are very knowledgeable about the area and resources. Given this knowledge of the area and the general nature of the actions in the management plan, the potential effects of implementing the alternatives were readily assessed and there were no effects that are likely to be highly controversial.

*Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks*

There are no potential effects that were highly uncertain or that involve unique or unknown risks.

*Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration*

This plan and environmental assessment are in compliance with applicable laws and policies and does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision regarding future considerations. The preferred alternative is consistent with other similar national heritage area plans.

*Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts*

As previously described, impacts resulting from the preferred alternative will be beneficial and limited to the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area and its immediate environs. Implementing the preferred alternative would contribute to cumulative effects when combined with the impacts of other past, present, and foreseeable future actions, but these cumulative effects are not significant.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources*

As described in the environmental assessment, implementing the preferred alternative will have major, long-term beneficial effects on historic and archeological resources. Therefore, there will be no adverse effects on, or loss of, these resources. In January 2012, the NPS consulted with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The SHPO concurred with the NPS determination that the Arabia Mountain Management Plan does not constitute a federal undertaking subject to compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Consultation under Section 106 should be re-initiated when specific implementation plans are in place for any projects that require federal funding, approval or permits.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed a copy of the environmental assessment in January 2012. They concurred (February 10, 2012) with the NPS determination that the preferred alternative may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, listed species. Two critically-imperiled granite outcrop plants, pool sprite (*Amphianthus pusillus*) and black-spored quillwort (*Isoetes melanospora*), occupy pool habitat on granite outcrops within the Heritage Area and were listed as threatened and endangered, respectively, by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in 1988.

Within the project area, extirpation of these protected species from historic quarries has occurred at Klondike Quarry, Hayden Quarry Road, Lithonia Rock, and Bradley Mountain. In addition, environmental conditions at the remaining outcrops are being modified by recreational uses, including using the pools as fire pits, foot traffic and impacts from off-road vehicles. Foot traffic and vehicle traffic in pools during the species' growing season uproots and crushes live plants, hastens the erosion of the pools' rims, and displaces soil from the pools. The thin soils of these pools are slow to recover from disturbance.

The unique granite formations at Arabia Mountain, within the Heritage Area, are considered critical to the recovery effort for black-spored quillwort and very important for pool sprite because they represent some of the best habitat range-wide for these species, and they are protected from development and further direct destruction of pools.

The preferred alternative for this management plan utilizes themed trails to control visitor footpaths and increase visitor awareness of sensitive environmental resources. By altering the manner in which visitors access the area, impact from foot traffic through the outcrops is expected to decrease. Implementation of the preferred alternative is expected to result in fewer impacts from recreational uses and, thus, a moderate, long-term beneficial impact through visitor education, observations, and awareness.

*Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law*

This action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

### *Scoping*

Scoping is an early and open process to determine the breadth of environmental issues and alternatives to be addressed in an environmental assessment. The Alliance conducted public scoping with the public and interested and affected groups and agencies between July 2004 and March 2006. The scoping process defined the purpose and need, identified potential actions to address the need, determined what the likely issues and impact topics would be, and identified the relationship, if any, of the proposed action to other planning efforts in the national heritage area.

Public scoping newsletters were sent in September 2004. In October 2004, a community concept charrette was held in which the plan goals were selected and alternatives were explored. In November of 2004, plan alternatives were presented in another community meeting. In 2005, meetings with the community as well as elected officials were held. The final draft plan was complete in March of 2006. At that time, the Alliance opted not to submit the plan for review and approval by NPS and the Secretary of the Interior. In 2010, the planning process was reinitiated, and the analysis contained within the EA was reassessed and confirmed. Appropriate updates were made to reflect current conditions within the Heritage Area.

### *Public and agency comments.*

A new public comment period began on August 8, 2011, with the release of the plan to the public for review, and concluded on September 9, 2011. The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance undertook a comprehensive campaign to notify the public and stakeholders that the plan was available. The Heritage Area website was updated to announce availability of the plan, and the document was uploaded to NPS Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) system. The plan was distributed to various public locations including libraries, history centers and local parks. Press releases to local papers and briefings for local, state, and federal officials were issued. Meetings with elected officials were conducted.

No comments were received as a result of the notification and comment process.

*Consultation: Tribes, Agencies, and Organizations Contacted*

The following agencies and tribes were consulted as a part of this planning process:

**Federal Agencies:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**Tribes:** None

**State Offices:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division (state historic preservation officer), and Georgia Department of Natural Resources, State Parks and Historic Sites Division.

## **CONCLUSION**

As described above, the preferred alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally require preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). Based on the analysis provided in the environmental assessment and this FONSI, the preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The selected alternative will result in long term beneficial impacts to resources. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.